

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE IMPACT OF BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND THE EU ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE BULGARIAN ARMED FORCES**

by

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ABSTRACT

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By achieving membership in both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), post-communist Bulgaria has achieved two major political objectives as well as accomplished long sought - after strategic goals. These memberships have already placed new demands and requirements upon the development of the Bulgarian Armed Forces. Bulgarian accession into these organizations came as a consequence of the efforts made by both the government and its people. It emblemizes everything that Bulgarians stand for. Successful accession to the European Union provides a good opportunity for a retrospective view on the key events that occurred during this long transition toward democracy.

This research paper intends to shed light on some of the key aspects of Bulgaria's post communist transition from communist to democratic rule, its accession into NATO, and a brand new challenge-membership in the E U. Analysis will also focus on the implication of these challenges for the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

THE IMPACT OF BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND THE EU ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BULGARIAN ARMED FORCES

Since 1990 the world has witnessed several major global geo-political events including the fall of the Soviet Union, end of the Warsaw Pact, eastward expansion of NATO, economic globalization, emergence of terror as a transnational phenomenon, and an ongoing Global War on Terrorism. These events have in many cases forced governments to adapt, change or transform. Nowhere has the magnitude of change been greater than in the dictator-type, communist governments characteristic of the post-Soviet eastern bloc countries like Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government, like most other governments which were under the dictatorship of their communist parties, has been undergoing a post communist transition in order to achieve political and economic stability and to rediscover its ancestral national values. Bulgarian citizens, in their contemporary history, have never enjoyed the well-being and safety enjoyed by the citizens of the U.S. or developed Western European countries. As was the case for a substantial number of the countries of the so-called Eastern bloc, Bulgaria was entirely dependent, politically and economically, on events that occurred in the former Soviet Union and in the countries that belonged to the bloc.

Like many other states in transition from communism toward democracy, Bulgaria has found the course to be much more painful than anticipated. In January 2007, after more than sixteen years of trying to achieve a major political objective and change its political environment, Bulgaria accomplished one of its most sought after-strategic goals: full membership in the European Union (EU). This remarkable event came as a consequence of the efforts made by both the government and the people, and represents everything that Bulgarians stand for. Successful accession into the EU provides a good opportunity for a retrospective view on the key events that occurred during this long transition toward democracy.

This research paper intends to shed light on some of the key aspects of Bulgaria's post communist transition and in particular its accession into NATO and new membership in the EU. In particular, analysis will focus on the implication of these challenges for the Bulgarian Armed Force (BUL AF)

Post-Communist Transitions in Bulgarian State since 1989

The recent history of Bulgaria from the fall of the communist regime in 1990 to today can be grouped into two basic periods. The first period comprises the years from 1990 to 1997 characterized by the dominating role of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in Bulgarian politics. During this period, every successive Bulgarian government, without exception, was engaged in

a dangerous game of “pretending to reform” while actually not reforming. This poker game just about led the country to state failure. The second period, from 1997 to date, has been marked by real changes in the society and the transformation of the political situation within Bulgaria. The turning point was the first government presided over by the Union of Democratic Forces, which came into power and tackled the tough task of democratic change.

From State Failure to Democracy

Bulgaria’s “Big Challenge” started on November 10, 1989 with a *coup d’état* that removed long standing communist party and country leader Todor Zhivkov from power. Along with this change, socio-economic development and political initiatives were implemented and a new beginning in Bulgarian political life was launched. A European-type party system was developed, in which political organizations sought to represent politically significant social interests. More than 200 officially registered parties emerged in 1989 seeking a voice in the government.¹ However, most of these parties were poorly organized and unable to attract any significant membership. In reality three major parties, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), and the Ethnic Movement for Rights and Freedom (EMRF) dominated the political scene in the early post - communist party system in Bulgaria. The sharing of the political landscape by these parties can be seen in the results of the elections for the National Assembly held in 1990, 1991, 1994, and 1997. While two of these three major powers (BSP and UDF) had some relative success, none of them was able to achieve a majority. For instance, the BSP won the 1990 election with 47.15 percent of the votes² while the UDF won the pre-term election in 1991 with 45.83 percent.³ The next two elections were won by the same parties. Although these two political parties were in power in post–communist Bulgaria they did not have clear positions on most political and economic issues.

The society experienced an acute political and economic crisis (like most of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe) which was the result of the changes made under the former Bulgarian Communist Party’s rule in pursuing the aim of its leaders: “keep the party from losing power by initiating changes themselves in order to take the credit and to retain as much control as it is possible.”⁴ In the early years of democratic changes, political and economic transition was not facilitated, with great frustration the result. The catastrophes in reforms affected the beginning of free market interconnections. Political parties, from November 1989 to the end of 1997, demonstrated an inability to perform the role of go-betweens linking citizens and institutions, and to further the consolidation of the nation.⁵ None of the governments from this period had a comprehensive and coordinated reform strategy. Neither BSP nor UDF took

over the economic policies of their predecessors. They were led by “eclecticism, improvisation, opportunism,”⁶ and last but not least had only short term goals (their own survival on the political scene as well as their leaders’ well being).

After two years of recovery (1993 and 1994) under the rule of the Expert Cabinet of Luben Berov when the annual gross domestic product (GDP) achieved its apogee,⁷ Bulgaria became the “worst managed country in Europe.”⁸ Further more, at the end of 1996 the conditions in the country, ruled by the BSP’s established cabinet, were similar to the conditions characteristic of state failure. All the governments in power from 1990 were unable to meet the expectations of the governed for a better life. The Bulgarian state was not able to deliver necessary “political goods like security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal framework of order and a judicial system to administer it, and fundamental infrastructural requirements such as roads and communications facilities to their citizens.”⁹ One of the most popular features was declining real national and per capita levels of GDP. The “growth” of Bulgarian GDP at the end of 1996 reached negative 10.1 percent and inflation was more than 300 percent.¹⁰ At the beginning of 1997 the extent of economic collapse was tremendous. Monthly inflation increased,¹¹ and the average salary dropped from \$110 to \$12 per month.¹² Bulgaria had more or less reached the bottom. Most of the people lived below the poverty line and they expressed their will for change on the streets in the biggest towns all over the country. The people of Bulgaria were looking for a new beginning.

Although the first period of Bulgarian transition was not as successful as was hoped, the beginning of the new era was being established in the political realm. Democratic changes took place in all spheres of society. More over, the BSP government started the initiatives for Bulgarian participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and applied for European Union membership. The foundation of democracy was being created.

The main challenge to Bulgarian society started in 1997 with the beginning of so called second period. Throughout this period, the ruling parties and movement have been able to obtain almost full control over national institutions. More over, all the governments since 1997 have succeeded in accomplishing their mandates. From the beginning of this second period a remarkable return of confidence and economic stability has been accomplished.¹³ The UDF government which won in 1997 with the vital support of both the international community and the nation took over the responsibility for heavy economic reforms. It established a currency board, built up a secure macroeconomic environment to improve financial discipline, and brought lost optimism and belief to the ordinary people. Bulgaria has moved onto the route of

Euro- Atlantic challenges- integration, democratic reform, and development of a market economy.¹⁴

The initiatives implementing by the UDF government were adopted by the next two governments; the government headed by ex-king of Bulgaria Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha from 2001, and the coalition government consisting of a finally matured BSP and the Movement for Rights and Freedom elected in 2005. Furthermore, the king's government has continued Bulgaria's integration with the Euro-Atlantic world and its close partnership with the U.S. In April 2004 Bulgaria became a NATO member country. Despite differences regarding foreign policy in the past, the BSP has continued the process of Euro-integration, and in January 2007 Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. The Bulgarian government ruled by BSP leader Sergei Stanishev attracts great amounts of American and European investment, and is an active partner and ally in coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Changes in the Bulgarian Army as a Consequence of Changes in the Society

"The policy in the field of the military building, the defense and security of each country is based on the concept of its own interest and the best way for its protection and strengthening. The most important task of each government is to keep the freedom and integrity of the state territory and its people."¹⁵

Changes made in the security realm in Bulgaria are the result of events which have occurred in the society. The development of the Bulgarian Armed Forces (BUL AF) as a foundation of the security system follows the changes made in the political realm. This required adaptation to the challenges coming from a new world reality, democratization, and the choice of orientation made by the nation. In particular, security sector reform is a major component of Bulgarian political and social transformation. Due to the linkages with events occurring in the community and in the Armed Forces; this transition follows the same periods which we saw in Bulgaria's post-Communist transition. The first stage comprises the years from 1990 to 1997 and is typified by "inconsistent, cosmetic and often interrupted"¹⁶ reforms in the Bulgarian Armed Forces. Since 1997, core changes in the Armed Forces started have been implementing. The main efforts for transition in the BUL AF have been focused chiefly on establishing sophisticated Civil Military Relations (CMR), Personnel Management (PM), and participation in structures for cooperative defense.

The establishment of a vision and an overall concept for conducting efficient military reform was not shaped at once. There was a long and sharp exchange of blows between the main political powers after 1990 (the BSP and UDF), which were not able to form a national

consensus on the country's geopolitical objectives. The lack of unambiguously defined strategic goals had a crucial affect on the Armed Forces' transition in the period 1990 – 1997. In the years after the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, Bulgaria was left alone. It had lost its long-security agenda and had nothing to replace it with. Despite the reorientation of its foreign policy toward the Europe in 1991 and 1992, the Bulgarian leadership (with some exceptions) was not able to accept NATO as a guarantee for national security. In addition, all the governments until 1997 (six all together) had tremendous difficulties in determining the major threats to Bulgaria and its strategic ends, ways, and means.

The first attempt to define a national security strategy was made in 1995, when the first *National Military Concept* (NMC) was issued by the socialist led government. It pointed out that “national interests can be protected by relying on the national military forces.”¹⁷ The socialist government saw military security as “determined by the strategic, political, and military factors in the international environment, on the one hand, and national military capabilities on the other.”¹⁸ While the concept identifies collaboration with international institutions and friendly states as a supplementary way for achieving national security, joining NATO was not a major strategic goal of the Bulgarian government at that time.

During the first period most of the changes occurred in the CMR realm and were oriented toward establishing civil control over the Armed Forces. The transition started with the turnover of key positions in the Ministry of Defense. Senior officers, most of them graduates of military academies and/or Staff Colleges in the Soviet Union, were partially replaced with civilian personnel, and the Defense Ministry was placed under civilian direction. The other explicit goal was to separate the army from politics and remove political training from the barracks (there were political officers in the units who were responsible for political preparation of the personnel).

The implementation of military reforms does not affect only the military staff. In order to conduct a successful transformation, political-societal institutions like parliaments, parties, voluntary public associations and the media as well as the security elites inside and outside of government must also be included.

In 1997 a so-called second period began with a change of government that became a turning point for BUL AF reform. Almost nothing concerning major structural reforms was accomplished before the UDF came in power in 1997. For instance in January 1999 Bulgarian Armed Forces still consisted of 112,000 service men, only a little less than 1990's 117,000 army personnel.¹⁹ In addition, the officers' pyramid did not look like a pyramid with the proportion of senior to junior officers at about 1.5 to 1. In 1999 the officers' corps consisted of roughly 3,300

lieutenants and senior lieutenants; 3,570 captains, 3,560 majors, 3,010 lieutenant colonels, and 2,400 colonels.²⁰ Therefore, BUL AF was not able to meet the requirements of the new era for small, modern, mobile, and capable Armed Forces.

Bulgaria was far behind in comparison with other countries which were part of the former Eastern Bloc. It had begun the changes in its military too late. Moreover, Bulgaria lacked a suitable National Security Concept (NSC) and Military Doctrine (MD) to determine national interests and strategic goals. On the basis of a long awaited consensus between political powers, in the spring of 1998 a new NSC was issued. At the end of next year, using the U.S. Defense Reform (Kievenaar) Study as a foundation, a Bulgarian Military Doctrine and Plan-2004 were developed and adopted. A NATO Membership Plan was established in the same year.²¹ Having clearly defined the goal of joining NATO in order to ensure its security, Bulgaria played an active role in establishing and activating the South- Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) set up by seven participating nations on August 31, 1999 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The main purpose for establishing this brigade was to contribute to the regional security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, and to foster co-operation, transparency, interoperability and good neighborly relations among South- Eastern European countries within the South- Eastern Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) process.

Since 1999 Bulgaria has had a special responsibility in the successful continuation of partnership with NATO and the EU in order to protect peace and stability in the region. The reform of the BUL AF has become an important factor for increasing the strength of civil society, successfully integrating with the EU and NATO, and sustaining social-economic development.

The Impact of NATO Membership on the Development of the Bulgarian Armed Forces

Since 1997 the Bulgarian government has remained committed to the two major goals: secure membership in NATO and the EU. In order to achieve the first aim, the government of Bulgaria joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program; supported NATO operations in Bosnia and Kosovo; sustained the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq; helped the U.S. government's War on Terror; and supported "Coalitions of the Willing" in Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. Also, the governments accommodated the headquarters of a multilateral peacekeeping force for Southeastern Europe for the first four years mandate beginning in 1999.

Bulgaria became a full member of NATO on March 29, 2004. This long sought after membership came as a consequence of the will of Bulgarians for a better life, and of the many changes made in the society. Association with NATO was an acknowledgement of achievements in establishing a new democratic political order, creating political and economic

stability and security within the country, and developing the BUL AF. On its way toward NATO membership Bulgarian had to undergo tremendous changes in many spheres. The reform of the BUL AF, including the elaboration of basic documents and implementation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP), were keys for association. Bulgaria has achieved one of its strategic goals. It must not stop the progress made throughout these years, but rather go forward to new challenges in the future.

The NATO impact on the BUL AF started long before Bulgaria's formal accession to this organization. The Bulgarian government understood the importance NATO membership and approached it tactfully. Furthermore, a careful assessment of the new security environment, the current situation in the country, and the ongoing transformation of the Alliance was carried out. Before it applied for joining NATO, the government started its Strategic Defense Review (SDR), which laid the foundation for documents such as: Long Term Vision for Development of the Troops and Forces-2015(LTDTF-2015), Plan for Organizational Development and Modernization of the Structures of the Armed Forces until 2015 (PODMSAF), and so on.

The SDR emerged in response to the need for a complex reassessment of the capabilities of the National Security System, and especially BUL AF as its major part, to produce sufficient defense and safety for Bulgarian citizen and to achieve NATO standards. The process was initiated a year after Bulgaria announced its will to join NATO, with the decision made by the National Security Council of the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense (MoD) on January 8, 2003.²² Twenty one working groups and committees were constituted, and experts from the Presidency, National Assembly, Government, Non Governmental Organizations, NATO member countries, and the USEUCOM were engaged in the working groups.

The main goal of the SDR was to create a vision for the development of national defense and the Armed Forces, adequate for the vital interests of the country, the new security environment, and available defense resources, and corresponding to the new conceptual views of NATO till the year 2015.

The fundamental principals and parameters of the SDR were built up in a political framework which defined the foundation for future defense planning requiring modern mobile forces capable of accomplishing their national defense mission as well as being deployable outside the national territory. As a result, new national defense priorities were adopted. Those priorities were mostly oriented toward NATO collective defense.

Based upon this political framework, a Long Term Vision for Development of the Troops and Forces-2015(LTDTF-2015) was issued. According to the Vision, the main Goal of BUL AF

is safeguarding Bulgaria's sovereignty, security, independence and territorial Integrity. In addition three main missions were identified:

- Defense - Participation in collective defense, on and outside the country's territory (Art. 9-Constitution of R Bulgaria)
- Support to International peace and security
 - Participation in international CRO outside the country's territory
 - Military cooperation
 - Arms Control and control of nonproliferation of WMD, including measures for enhancing confidence and security
- Contributions to national security in peacetime
 - Surveillance/ Intelligence, Control and Defense
 - He fight against terrorism, organized crime and illegal trafficking
 - Crises response.²³

A conclusion included in the SDR is that BUL AF development should occur in conjunction with larger changes in the security realm. These changes are significant and demand the complete transformation of the National Security System (NSS). The Bulgarian MoD concluded that the comprehensive transformation would be achieved by redefining the security system, including new visions, concepts and doctrines, organizational structure, full profesionalization by the year 2010, build-up, training, deployment and sustenance, modernization and the deactivation of existing capabilities that are no longer needed.

As a consequence of the Strategic Defense Review the Plan for the development and modernization of the Armed Forces until 2015 has come into view. The basic purpose of Plan 2015 is to determine the key activities for meeting the requirements of the BUL AF in the acquisition of the necessary operational capabilities within the estimated resource limitations. At the same time, it is necessary to establish prerequisites for development of the national scientific, technological and economic potential required for the protection of the national interests of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The Influence of Interoperability with NATO Member States on the Bulgarian Army

Having struggled to achieve the strategic goal of membership in NATO, Bulgaria had to begin the modernization of its Armed Forces in order to be interoperable with the forces of NATO member states. The Bulgarian government has been trying to guarantee that its membership will contribute to the realization of NATO's traditional mission and the implementation of collective defense, as well as crisis management and peace support

missions. In the last few years Bulgaria made significant progress in defense reform with the implementation of a new National Security Concept, a New Military Doctrine, and the reform plan known as Plan 2004. Even though associated with the Alliance, the BUL AF have not been able to meet all standards, especially regarding interoperability of units assigned to take part in NATO led operations. Plan 2004 was able to secure a balanced and stage-by-stage development of military capabilities in order to achieve required interoperability for the implementation of the expected missions and tasks as an element of collective defense. Of special importance were transformations in personnel management, logistics and equipment, language proficiency, and participation in NATO led operations.

Structure of BUL AF and Personnel Management

The MoD of Bulgaria in its LTDTF-2015 has determined that in today's security environment the BUL AF does not need large forces. They do need units with more specialized capabilities. In this new strategic environment of collective defense, BUL AF were forced to start reform in order to meet the Required Operational Capabilities (ROC) formulated in SDR and based on the threat analysis and planning assumptions. These include:

- Properly Manned, Sustained, Agile and Mobile Military Formations, Capable of Independently Accomplishing their Missions and Tasks or as a Part of Multinational Forces, Inside or Outside National Territory
- NATO Interoperable, Secure Communication Systems to Support Command and Control, Information, Computer, and Intelligence Systems
- Unified Chain of Command
- NATO Interoperable Forces Capable of Conducting Joint and Combined Operations Within or Outside of Bulgaria
- Forces Capable of Conducting Combined Arms Operations
- Tactical and Operational Maneuverable Forces
- Immediate Reaction Forces
- Logistics Sustainment
- All Source Intelligence Fusion
- Support to Interagency or NGO operations
- Professional Development²⁴

The first stage of the transformation of BUL AF began in 2001 with the shaping of the functional and organizational structures shown in figures №1 and №2. These structures were updated on June 1, 2006, and have become much closer to the NATO structures.

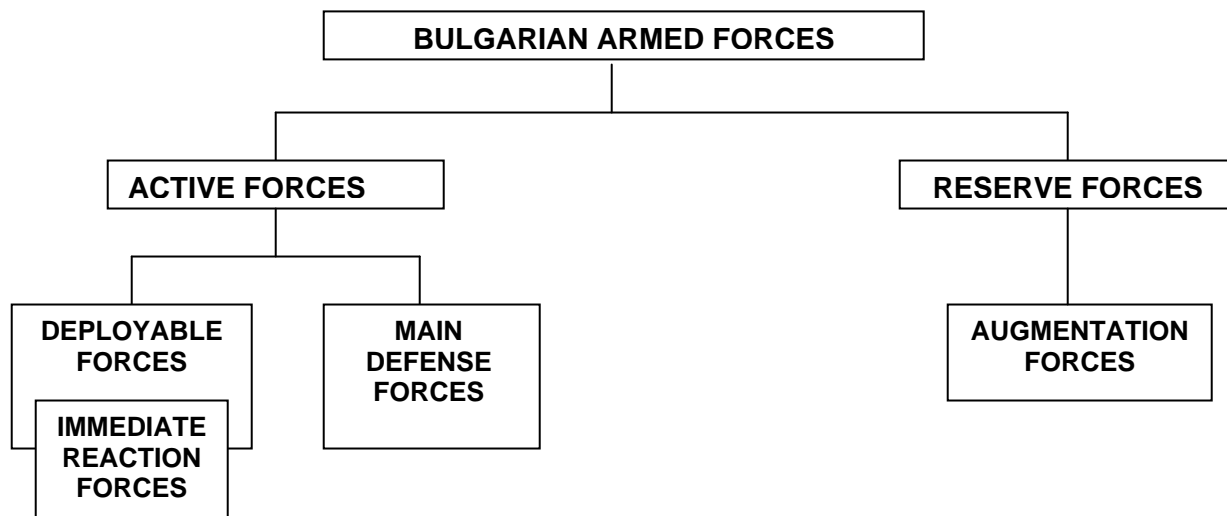


Figure 1: Functional Structure of BUL AF to Jun 01, 2006²⁵

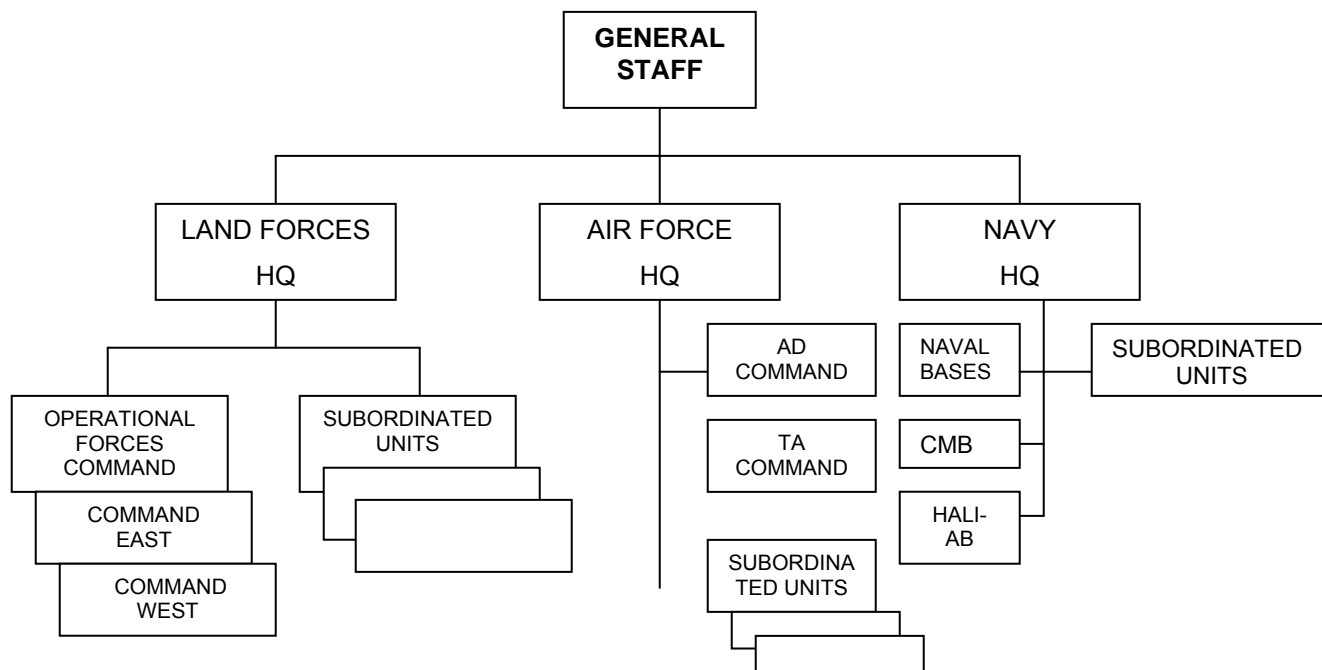


Figure 2: Organizational Structure of BUL AF to June 1, 2006²⁶

The new functional structure, which was created and commenced its implementation on June 1, 2006 is divided into two main forces, active and support elements, and forces of lower readiness. The active forces comprise deployable forces and forces for collective defense, or so called forces provided to NATO, which are assigned for use in NATO immediate action and response forces. This structure is shown in figure № 3.

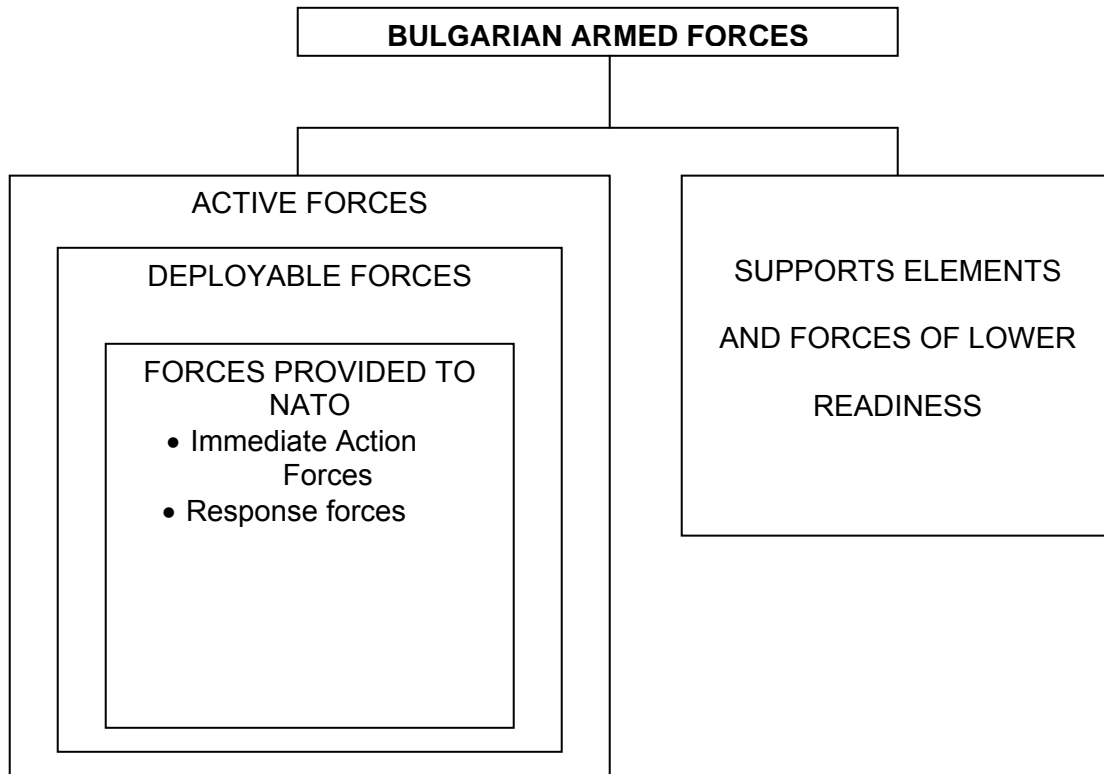


Figure 3: Functional Structure of BUL AF since June 1, 2006²⁷

In order to meet NATO standards, the Bulgarian Armed Forces have been divided into three different levels. The first level is the General Staff of the Armed Forces, which emerged as a strategic level. The second level is the operational domain, including the Joint Operational Command (JOC), Land Forces Command, Air Force Command, and NAVY Command. All the service commands are force providers to JOC, whose main task is to plan and conduct both internal and multinational operations. Then the forces are deployed, only JOC has operational control over them. The last level is the tactical level consisting of brigades, regiments, and battalions for the Land forces as well as air and naval bases, and squadrons for Air and Navy forces. This new organization structure is shown in Figure № 4.



Figure 4: Organizational Structure of BUL AF since June 1, 2006²⁸

Transformation is a continuous process. A very important part of this process is the changes made in BUL AF which have taken place in personnel management realm. The first steps toward an effective reform (reduction) regarding manpower were taken in 2003. At this time the foundation of a new personnel management strategy was established. This approach has been continued in the SDR and LTDTF-2015 where the Bulgarian government has determined that the country requires Armed Forces with new capabilities even if they are fewer in number. Thus the expectations of the government have been focused on the quality of the soldiers in order to build up compatible Armed Forces.

The analysis made in the SDR showed that the model for developing a personnel management strategy was not effective. Moreover, although Plan – 2004 achieved its main goal—the preparation of BUL AF for NATO membership—reforms regarding the personnel system brought a lot of concerns. The most important concerns mentioned in the SDR and in the Concept for Personnel Management in the Ministry of Defense, Bulgarian Army, and Structures subordinated to the Minister of Defense, created as a response to the needs for quick NATO integration and in order to determine new criteria for personnel management in BUL AF, are as follows:

- “Personnel management is not taken into consideration as a strategic issue, which affects the lack of strategic planning priorities in this realm

- There is no foundation program for personnel management which must be part of the Integrated System for Managing Defense Resources
- Huge difficulties in attempts to protect the investment in education of officers, NCO's, and soldiers
- Handing over responsibilities and rights in accordance with an officer's ranks does not respond to the systems for personnel management in NATO. Very often junior officers take over the responsibilities and duties of their subordinates
- Lack of unified rules for shaping establishments
- The contracts signed so far are formal and do not represent well written and signed contract without complicated terms
- The lack of a system for advertising military service and recruiting soldiers
- Nowadays the structure and system for preparing a reserve force is not up- to -date and does not respond to the new requests for developing BUL AF²⁹

The goal is to reorder the entire system of personnel management with the intention of meeting NATO standards in term of interoperability. The Bulgarian MoD has had some success reducing manpower. Prior to the last reduction in 2006 Bulgaria had 51,000 active-duty military personnel split into services as follows: Army -25,000, Air Force - 13,100, Navy - 4,370, and 8,530 on the central staff.³⁰ It is still far from achieving a structure similar to its counterparts in the NATO countries. The main reason for this condition is the inability of the leadership to stop dreaming about the past and start changing its views regarding transformation.

Equipments and Weaponry

When Bulgaria became a NATO member, BUL AF had a substantial amount of equipment drawn from old Soviet bloc supplies. In many cases, both interoperability and capability were lacking. The huge gap in the interoperability realm was exposed through Bulgarian participation in different Peace Keeping Operations. During those missions, it became clear that BUL AF needed changes in order to be able to meet its alliance commitments. Bulgarian units involved in these PKOs had and still have to bring their own ammunition and parts for repairing vehicles. There are even some difficulties with securing fuel for the trucks.

Joining NATO faced Bulgaria with the dilemma of modernizing its Armed Forces in order to achieve required operational capabilities. Even before Bulgarian accession to the Alliance some defense specialists assessed that implementation of Plan-2004 was only a short term goal. The need for adequate and resource-supported long-term strategic plans was acknowledged, as well as the importance of establishing sufficient operational capabilities. For

that purpose, MoD had to develop a detailed plan for resource support of up-dated projects for the processes of modernization, restructuring and introduction of new armament and equipment in the BUL AF. An important step in this direction was the Strategic Defense Review which resulted in the Plan for organizational development and modernization of the Armed Forces until 2015. The basic purpose of this plan is to determine the key activities for meeting the requirements of the BUL AF in the acquisition of the necessary operational capabilities within the estimated resource limitations, and to establish prerequisites for the development of the national scientific, technological and economic potential for protection of the national interests of the Republic of Bulgaria. The Plan was divided into three major parts. The first part defined the major programs and projects for modernization in 2002 preparatory for NATO membership. The second part clarified the basic activities and parameters of the modernization programs in the period 2003-2007, and the third part determined the chief directions for modernization of the Armed Forces until 2015.³¹

Implementation of this plan requires not only the simply replacement or modernization of old weapon systems, but it also the creation of new defense capabilities that are essential for national and collective security needs.

English Language Proficiency

Full membership in NATO has created new missions and tasks for the armed forces. Bulgaria has been taking part in a variety of alliance activities such as PKO's in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Numerous combined and bilateral exercises have been conducted to facilitate Bulgarian officers' learning of NATO procedures. This huge involvement of the military units and personnel of the BUL AF in a wide range of NATO operations requires interoperability, which means the personnel involved in these activities should have well developed language skills. Such skills are essential for the future participation of BUL AF in the NATO system for collective defense, NATO led missions, and exercises.

The first attempts to create a system for studying the English language were made at the end of the 1990s. Many servicemen and civilians were given the possibility to study the English language using existing but limited training systems. In accordance with the Strategy for English Language Training 2000-2005 extensive activities were conducted in BUL AF in order to meet alliance standards. The Bulgarian MoD invested in additional courses and used every available approach to meet NATO standards in order to have a well prepared staff prior to Bulgarian accession to the organization.

Together with developing the training system, a system for testing reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills and reporting level of proficiency was developed in accordance with the NATO standard STANAG-6001.

Despite the accomplished objectives, concerning organization, implementation of training plans, and STANAG – 6001 examinations, there were many weaknesses that were recognized as obstacles for achieving the desired end state; full interoperability of BUL AF with other NATO countries. Some of the obstacles are as follows:

- Civilian organizations involved in training process were not able to meet the requirements concerning quality of preparation.³²
- Many service men and civil servants were given an opportunity to attend a variety of courses but they did not achieve the required level of English proficiency.³³ That can be seen in the result of the tests conducted every April and November from 1999 to 2001. The total number of certified personnel was 1466, but only 3 were able to cover the forth level (fully professional) in accordance with STANAG – 6001; 110 achieved the third level (semi professional); 242 the second level (working), and the remainder of 796 the first level (elementary).³⁴
- Most of the military personnel and civil servants were not able to meet the English language requirements depicted in their job-descriptions.
- There were many differences regarding methods of teaching among the teachers from military schools and their colleagues from the language centers all over Bulgaria and as a consequence the results achieved were not consistent.
- There was a failure to use the experience and knowledge obtained during training in countries like the USA, Great Britain, Canada, and other countries taking part in the Partnership for Peace Program³⁵

The full membership in NATO and the continuing participation of Bulgarian units in a large range of NATO led operations put new, higher requirements before the BUL AF and made English language preparation a key task for future interoperability and efficient interaction with allies. In response, a new Strategy for developing the English Language Training and Testing System for the Period 2006 – 2010 was issued. This strategy clearly defined the strategic goal of creating conditions for improving the training and testing system as well as conditions which will give the opportunity for developing the skills of both military and civil personnel in order to achieve a professional level of English competence in accordance with the NATO standard STANAG – 6001. The brigade from BUL AF assigned to be part of NATO rapid reaction forces has to be certified and ready for deployment by July 1, 2007.

Participation in NATO Led Operations

Despite the consequences of political changes in Bulgaria on its way toward accession to NATO, all Bulgarian governments were trying to assist an active participation of BUL AF's units in joined military exercises due to the need of increasing the interoperability with the NATO forces at their carrying out peace support operations.

Bulgarian participation in NATO led operation started as far back as 1998 with the Civil Military Co – operation (CIMIC) group, comprises seven servicemen in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Throughout the years, Bulgaria increased its contribution to SFOR with an engineer, transport, and mechanized platoons, and a security company from the Bulgarian Armed Forces which consist of about 265 servicemen.³⁶ This mission was handed over On Dec 02, 2004 to the European Union Forces but there are not any changes regarding structure and tasks implemented by the Bulgarian contingent there.

As a respond on the events of Sep 11, 2001 and appropriate to its desire for contributing to the international peace, Bulgaria joined International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan on Jan 21, 2002 after the decision made by the Bulgarian National Assembly. The first Contingent of BUL AF sent to Afghanistan was platoon, comprised 32 servicemen and was responsible for decontamination of coalition forces there. Due to the changes in the region, on Jul 29.2003 in accordance with the decision made by the government of Republic of Bulgaria the mission of the contingent in Afghanistan has been changed and as a consequence of this act the unit was transformed into mechanize platoon.

Simultaneously with their large-scale transformation, the Bulgarian Armed Forces actively participate with contingents in the different crisis response operations which determine the practical dimensions of Bulgarian policy of European-Atlantic integration and intensive regional cooperation. The participation of the Bulgarian Armed Forces in the NATO led operations is a serious national contribution to the world peace and security, and to the NATO allies. Participation in each of those peace support operations is a huge challenge for the BUL AF on the one hand but on the other hand each one demonstrates the greatest Bulgarian responsibility before its allies, partners, and the entire world community. Furthermore, as a full NATO member Bulgaria will continue to participate in NATO led operations, fulfilling its obligations and extending its contribution to coalition forces in Afghanistan with 200 more military men.

European Union Membership as a New Challenge for the BUL AF

Bulgaria became a member of the European Union on January 1, 2007. The EU plays an important role is strengthening regional and global security, and its policy includes a military

dimension. The idea for a Common European Union Defense has found practical expression with EU involvement in the post-conflict reconstruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Operation ALTHEA, which was taken over by the EU on December 2, 2004. As a member of both NATO and the EU, Bulgaria must meet the challenge of cooperation with both organizations.

In April 2001 Bulgaria officially announced the personnel and the units from the BUL AF designated for use in future operations conducted by the EU. These units are part of the forces that Bulgaria provides as a full NATO member, and they are operationally compatible with those of other NATO and EU members. A practical manifestation of an active security policy in the past years was the participation in missions and operations abroad - participation through which Bulgaria upheld its responsibilities to the European and Euro-Atlantic community. As a continuation of its policy for integration and cooperation, Bulgaria will increase its participation in the EU defense system with an infantry (mechanized) company as a part of a combat group of the EU forces "Hal brook". This group combines the efforts of four countries of the Balkan region, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, and Bulgaria, in promoting peace and stability in the region. The group should be operationally ready by July 1, 2007.

NATO and the EU can collaborate successfully. Bulgarian contributions to NATO and the EU will therefore be straightforward and harmonized. The BUL AF should continue to strengthen their capabilities for participation in PKO's, the provision of support to the civilian population in crisis, and the build up of civil-military cooperation capabilities.

Conclusion

Being a NATO and EU member state is a great privilege, but also a huge responsibility. This is especially true for a country like Bulgaria which has had to walk the whole the way from communism, through near state failure, to the successful promotion of democracy. The people of Bulgaria were able to overcome the incompetence and childish mistakes of the country's leadership in the first years of post – communist transition. Bulgarian accession into both NATO and the EU came as a consequence of the efforts made by the governments and the people since 1997 with the efficient support of the Armed Forces. These accessions provide good opportunities for the further development of EU and Euro- Atlantic integration as well as the continued construction of strong relationships with other countries.

Endnotes

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